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Pools / Dreams / Parental Gaze

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Pools / Dreams / Parental Gaze

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art in Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth
University.

by

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Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, 2010

Director:

Corin Hewitt, Assistant Professor, Sculpture + Extended Media

Virginia Commonwealth University

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ABSTRACT

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By Tal Gafny, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art in Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014

Major Director:

Corin Hewitt, Assistant Professor, Sculpture + Extended Media

This thesis is a testimony of thoughts and ideas that have been circulating in my studio for the past few years, in their current form. It is also an experiment in writing an autobiographical piece of prose. It was written parallel to, and after, making the film *Double Take* with Perrin Turner. The film is an exploration of a number of relationships, related and sometimes haunted by one another. I wish for this text to operate not only as an after-the-fact recollection of thoughts, but also in relation to what will follow it – similarly to the way a trailer operates in relation to a movie. This is an extract and a prologue rather than conclusion or resolution.

My Curated Collection of Quotes

A couple nights ago I dreamt I was at a pool. The pool was bottomless. There was a dial you could turn to pick the kind of water you wanted and there were three options - clear water, water with chlorine or water with salt. I turned the dial over and over again as I gathered the courage to get in the pool, and the water kept changing, accordingly. At long last, when I was finally ready to get in, I realized I didn't have a bathing suit with me. I turned around to find my mother, sitting beside the pool. She had a cardboard box with all of her old bathing suits in it. I tried them on, one after another, but none of them fit me. Some were too large, others were too small, in some I felt too exposed, some were too reserved.

Me

* * *

The briars of unclean lusts grew so that they towered over my head, and there was no hand to root them out. On the contrary my father saw me one day in the public baths, now obviously growing toward manhood and showing the turbulent signs of adolescence. The effect upon him was that he already began to look forward to grandchildren, and he went home in happy excitement to tell my mother. He rejoiced, indeed, through that intoxication in which the world forgets You its creator and loves what You have created instead of You, the intoxication of the invisible wine of a will perverted and turned towards baseness. But in my mother's breast You had already laid the foundation of Your temple and begun Your holy habitation: whereas my father was still only a catechumen, and a new catechumen at that. So that she was stricken with a holy fear. And though I was not yet baptised, she was in terror of my walking in the crooked ways of those who walk with their backs toward You and not their faces.¹

St. Augustine

* * *

Yet all that day I was heavy with grief within and in the trouble of my mind I begged of You in my own fashion to heal my pain; but You would not - I imagine because you meant to impress upon my memory by this proof how strongly the bond of habit holds the mind even when it no longer feeds upon deception. The idea came to me to go and bathe, for I had heard that the bath - which the Greeks call balaneion - is so called because it drives anxiety from the mind And this also I acknowledge to Your mercy, O Father of orphans, that I bathed and was the same man after as before. The bitterness of grief had not sweated out of my heart. Then I fell asleep, and woke

¹ Michael P. Foley (editor). Augustine: Confessions. Trans. By: F.J. Sheed. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006. Pg. 27-28

again to find my grief not a little relieved. And as I was in bed and no one about, I said over those true verses that Your servant Ambrose wrote of You:

*God, Creator of all things,
Ruler of heaven, who robes the day
With shimmering light, and makes the night.*

*For sleep's release:
That quiet rest should give again
To burdened bodies zest for work,
And lift the weights from tired minds,
Unravelling all anxious knots of grief.²*

St. Augustine

* * *

JESSE:

You are not how I remember you from class
I mean, like, not at all.

WALTER:

Yeah, well, I gotta go.

JESSE:

Wait. wait. Hold up. Tell me why you're doing this. Seriously.

WALTER:

Why do you do it?

JESSE:

Money, mainly.

WALTER:

There you go.

JESSE:

nah, common, man. Some straight like you, giant stick up his
ass, all a sudden at age, what, 60, he's just gonna break bad?

WALTER:

² Michael P. Foley (editor), 2006. Pg. 182-183

I'm 50.

JESSE:

It's weird, is all. Ok, it doesn't compute. Listen, if you've gone crazy or something, if you've gone crazy, or depressed. I'm- I'm just saying. That's something I need to know about. Okay, I mean, that affects me.

WALTER:

I am awake.

JESSE:

What?

WALTER:

Buy the RV. We start tomorrow.

Breaking Bad

* * *

There is no one who wants to be asleep always - for every sound judgment holds that it is best to be awake - yet a man often postpones the effort of shaking himself awake when he feels a sluggish heaviness in the limbs, and settles pleasurably into another doze though he knows he should not, because it is time to get up.³

St. Augustine

* * *

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

³ Michael P. Foley (editor), 2006. Pg. 148

Another Helicopter Moment

In 2010 I made an installation that included a helicopter seat cushion. It was part of the remains from an accident that occurred earlier that year. This privately owned helicopter, containing four adult men, crashed due to a mechanical failure. The crash was barely noticed on the local news as it competing with the high flow of political events and occurrences in Israel. Initially, it was the form, color and scale of a certain part of the remains I saw in a photo that caught my attention and reminded me of my sculptures. It felt as if a real world event had produced an object that I might make. The crash also interested me on a more conceptual level as an object falling from the sky to the ground. That connected to other work I was making that dealt with the floor and ceiling of the exhibition space as a reference to the sky and ground outside of it.

Between that earlier work and my most current project, I made work without a specific story in mind, or any kind of direct tie to the world outside of the artwork itself. I tried to use time to explore and expand my sculptural vocabulary, and to ask more formal questions about the objects I was making. I was investigating the way my imagination operates, how I use color and form, and considering decisions about scale. But my main question was about geometry. It seemed that geometry was always present in the work, and I struggled to articulate what it meant for me. My thoughts were moving between Israeli local architecture, to math, psychology and spirituality. Was it a default I had because I had grown up in a certain architectural environment (such as Tel Aviv Bauhaus)?

Was it an abstraction of the human body and by that directed to a more psychological direction? Or was it the mathematical aspect translated into some kind of spiritual code? All of these seemed to be components in my fascination with geometry, but I still lacked a sense of specificity in articulating it.

Recently, the urge to make objects that are more “alive” has grown stronger. It was something about the stillness of an object that had begun to bother me. There are two examples in which I tried to address that issue directly. One object is a big eyebrow made out of black felt that I had planned to be hung on the wall and portray different moods or emotional states, depending on the angle it is being hung in. The second one is a glass sphere, with an interior that I had coated in soot. Still, it seemed to me that the essence of these objects resided in the process of making them instead of as completed objects in a room. The mutability of the angle of the eyebrow was more important than any one specific angle and the black smoke spreading inside the glass sphere was more important than the finished all-black object.

But there was something else happening at the same time: since I read Paul Auster’s autobiography *Winter Journal* in August 2013, it took up residence in my mind and gradually made its way into my studio. It was the absence of the author’s son, Daniel Auster, from the book that grabbed my attention. I couldn’t articulate yet, what it was about it that was so glaring, but I knew it had to do with some deeply rooted identification, something that had to do with the feeling of being forgotten or left out. My immediate response was to try and contact Daniel on Facebook. At this point this powerful desire to reach out to him felt very

separate from my work. My attempt failed to get a response and I put it aside. In October, I was required to write a piece for the graduate seminar led by Ester Partegas. The assignment was to openly respond to Lacan's ideas of the object of desire. My writing ended up being a letter to Paul Auster:

Dear Mr. Paul Auster,

My past summer has been extremely difficult. I had spent it in Israel, my home country, after moving the Richmond, Virginia, a year ago to do my MFA. The first year in the states was hard – some in an expectable way and some in unexpected ways. I always knew that moving here, would be first and foremost returning to the place where my parents separated, 23 years ago, making contact with the first major void in my life – the disappearance of my father, who had to stay here long after my mom, my brother and I had returned to Israel. I was a six year old girl who suddenly lost her dad for a year and a half with no warning. I guess all this and more were why everything built up to an explosion this summer. My relationship with my mother has reached new dark places it has not visited before, and we are currently not in touch. I spent all of the summer at my dad's, where luckily I found out I do have a home, trying to find ways to deal with this sudden deep depression.

I feel better now.

In the beginning of the summer I decided to read your first book, which I have never read before, although I was a big fan of yours in high school. I found it brilliant. Probably my favorite of yours now. About a week later, I found out a new book from you just came out – an autobiographical piece which was described by critics as a bridge to that first book I had just finished reading.

The first sentences were exactly what I needed to read:

“You think it will never happen to you, that it cannot happen to you, that you are the only person in the world to whom none of these things will ever happen, and then, one by one, they all begin to happen to you, in the same way they happen to everyone else.”⁴

I read only that and saved the rest for my 5 days in Berlin + the long flight back to NY. I enjoyed it so much. It was really exactly what I needed to read. It was simple and honest and straightforward. Not as complex as that first book, not an example for incredible writing, but that is ok. Because it gave me what I needed.

I held my breath until the very last word. It started bothering me probably about half way through. But I trusted you. I trusted you to fill this void. And sadly, you failed me. I finished this novel feeling somewhat deceived, or misled. Maybe that is because I myself feel like a forgotten child in my darkest moments and I’m projecting myself onto Daniel. I really don’t know. But still – how could you leave such a void in this autobiographical piece? How could you just leave him out of it?

You only mention him as a technical factor in your apartment search. Or rather as a reason for having to compromise your living environment because you have to find a place with a room for him too. He is only mentioned. Not even by name. And when a story does occur in relation to him, it is a horrifying one:

“Age 30 to 31. A bleak time, without question the bleakest time you have ever gone through, brightened only by the birth of your son in June 1977. But that was the place where your first marriage broke apart, where you were overwhelmed by constant money problems (as described in *Hand to Mouth*), and you came to a dead end as a poet. You don’t believe in haunted houses, but when you look back on that time now, you feel that you were living under an evil spell, that the house itself was partly to blame for the troubles that descended on you... Then you moved in, and in those early days of cleaning and rearranging furniture, you and your first wife pulled an armoire away from the wall in the upstairs hallway and found a dead crow on the floor behind it – a long-dead crow, utterly desiccated but intact.”⁵

⁴ Auster, Paul. *Winter Journal*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2012. Pg. 1

⁵ Paul Auster, 2012. Pg. 88-90

Leaving your son, Daniel, as a void in your act of writing, only makes him more present. The more you erase him, the more he will appear. That is perhaps, the great truth that this book offers – erasure constructs your story as much as your writing does.

My favorite character in your recent book, Mr. Auster, is your son Daniel – he is the one who truly allows me to project myself on. And not because I identify with his assumed position in your family, but because he gives me the space to be whoever I really am.

Sincerely,

Tal Gafny

It was around the time of writing this letter (which was never sent to Paul, and was never meant to be sent) that it occurred to me that this is another “helicopter moment”. It was something separate from my studio that came from reality rather than my imagination; something that drew my attention in the same feeling of urgency that those helicopter remains did.

My next step was an attempt to get to the bottom of my interest and perhaps projection onto the Auster family. I turned the letter into a script. I didn’t change anything text-wise. I divided the text, my words, my voice, into being spoken by different members of my family. I was trying to figure out what components in the letter would be things that my mother would say, what of it was more my father’s voice speaking through me, and what was my brother. There were also parts I wanted to be read by a chorus. I rewrote it, formally, as a script, and printed it on pink copy paper. I had then asked a group of fellow students to perform it with me. In the performance (titled “A Letter to Paul Auster”) we were all holding copies of the script and did a reading of it.

We had rehearsed a couple of times in my studio beforehand, and the feeling of having other people in my studio working with me, was new and exciting. For me it was like a chemical reaction almost, to the stillness of my objects. There was movement, and voices, and we were all holding the script, which was in itself an object I was happy with, but could not be presented without the hands holding it and flipping through it.

It was around that time that I finally heard back from Daniel.

Finding and Losing Daniel Auster

*"I am just a dreamer and you are just a dream
You could have been anyone to me."*

Neil Young, Like A Hurricane

As mentioned, after reading Paul Auster's memoir, I had decided to locate and contact his son Daniel. The cover of the book has a big X drawn across it: both a mark for where something is to be found, and for absence. Paul Auster tells his biography through listing and describing all the apartments he has ever lived in. He constructs an ongoing exterior that is meant to portray an internal world of a man, a father and an author. Yet it seemed to me that some things revealed in the book, were perhaps meant to remain hidden. I felt this way about the near total omission of Paul's son. I was so struck by the near total absence of Daniel who never even gains the volume of a character in the book.

As soon as I returned to Richmond from Berlin I Google searched the name "Daniel Auster". I came across a story, which I would later discover to be pretty well known to my American friends, especially the New-Yorkers among them:

In Ms. Hustvedt's new novel, What I Loved, just published by Henry Holt, her stepson, Daniel Auster-Paul Auster's son by his former wife, the writer Lydia Davis-makes a thinly veiled appearance. What is striking about this is that Paul

Auster has generally been circumspect about his son, with what would seem to be good reason: In 1998, Daniel Auster, then 20, pleaded guilty in Manhattan Supreme Court to stealing \$3,000 from a deceased drug dealer named Andre (Angel) Melendez and received a sentence of five years' probation. Melendez was not just any deceased drug dealer-his death became a tabloid bonanza when his killer turned out to be a downtown party promoter named Michael Alig. Mr. Alig-currently serving a sentence of 20 years at the Southport Correctional Facility in Pine City, N.Y.-killed Melendez and chopped up his body, with some help from his roommate Robert Riggs, who was also convicted of manslaughter.

While Daniel Auster was never implicated in the slaying, he admitted to being in the apartment while it happened, according to a 1998 Reuters report of his courtroom plea.

All in all, not the sort of event any father would want his son to be involved in, and not the sort of story a father would want the world to spend too much time pondering. But now the world-or at least the New York literary community-can do just that, thanks to Ms. Hustvedt's new novel.

("The Observer" 3/17/03)

This made me want to find him even more. The darker the reason the worse is the absence – the more there is behind this absence, the more it becomes dramatic. Finding out about this criminal story felt like entering the backstage of the novel. Tying Daniel's absence from the book directly to this information felt too flat, but the 1996 incident added another layer of mystery; the absence from the book seemed to me less conscious. As a parent, Paul Auster is challenged with the conflict of sin and love, with the idea of unconditional love. Paul Auster the author is challenged with the idea of truth telling.

Some time after writing the letter to Paul Auster, I have come to feel that I don't want to place myself in a position that questions or judges Auster as a

parent. I was more interested in the fact that a piece that was missing from the book had revealed itself to my intuition. I wanted to know why I noticed it and why it felt so important to me. That is why I needed to talk to Daniel and not to Paul – Daniel, I thought, could be my mirror.

I found Daniel on Facebook. It took him three months to reply, but he did. We began a communication, which I would rather keep private (the question of privacy is huge here, and I intend to discuss it later on). It became very close very fast, and as fast as it happened it vanished. Before we even got to meet each other he had disappeared from me. I am still hoping to meet him some day. Now that I have made the work his role as a symbol has lessened and I have become more interested in him as a real presence in my life.

(To be as revealing as I can consciously - it is possible, that these two interests, the personal and the symbolic, have never been separate for me. The reasons for which I am attracted to initiate relationships and bring them into my work, are deeply rooted in a very specific kind of a thirst for closeness, which I inherently lack due to my personal history, specifically my father's absence from my life for a year and a half after my parents' divorce.)

How did Daniel operate as a symbol? Largely, it was a projection that stepped out of the territory of the imagination into the realm of action; it was a desire attempted to be fulfilled, rather than kept unrealized. One of the most

significant moments in my communication with Daniel was when he told me [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] We made a mutual discovery of having a similar internal void. My father had been absent, and his father left him out from his life story. The empty space we both carry, became the focal point of our encounter. I was hoping that we could use this as a starting point for a collaboration. I fantasized about making a work with him that would somehow, for the both of us, partially fill these voids.

I stopped searching for admissions of guilt from my parents quite long ago. In that sense, I did not want to have a dialogue with the author himself, the father. I was pursuing a dialogue with the son, the child, who I identified with. I have stopped searching for answers in regards to my father – how could he not be there with us for a year and a half, to prioritize his own professional goals over being a part of his children’s lives. I built a sufficient confidence in his love over the years. That trust is occasionally shaken, but I am improving my ability to work through it . The lost time has left an empty space that perhaps can’t ever be filled, but I work on ways to live with it. Daniel, it seemed to me, was having similar issues, and I was curious to at least find out if I was right.

Another part of this identification with Daniel, had to do with Paul Auster as a famous and powerful writer and as a kind of authority. Reading his book, especially in light of it being a biography, required me to put faith in him as the storyteller. The absence of Daniel in his book shook that authority for me on two

levels: first it made me doubt his ways of telling a story, second it made me doubt him as a father. Daniel, the son, was the one who suffered from what I thought of as careless writing, in the same way that I suffered from my father's mistakes. It made me want to reach out to a neglected character and child.

Drawing these connections between us, seeing him as a male mirror to who I am, has brought up questions about good and evil, and other dichotomies in the world. Does Daniel's involvement in a crime in the late 90's makes him a bad person? If so, what part does it play in my identification with him? Do I carry around guilt of my own? How is it that I feel such pure energy from someone with such morally conflicted history? Thinking through these things, I was lead to Augustine's confessions, which are a kind of testimony on these very issues.

St. Augustine (354-430) was born in Thagaste, North Africa, into a world dominated by the Roman Empire. In "The Confessions" he describes his life from the age of 11 to the age of 30, through an ongoing set of questions about himself, life and God, to whom he addresses his writing. A lot of these questions resonate as modern philosophical questions; both in their content and in the way they are thought. The question of good and evil, or sin, and why do we sin, is central. The most famous is the theft of the pears at the age of 16:

"It has always amazed people that, in this year of burgeoning sexual desire, the sin he concentrated on – spending over half of book 2 of The Testimony on an introspective analysis of it – is the theft of some pears. Why spill so many words on what many dismiss as a child's petty theft?"

It was more than that to Augustine. In fact, he had dismissed with passing mention earlier thefts of food from his family larder, food used to bribe others into letting him play with them. That theft had a motive. The pear theft seemed not to... Why did they do it? Augustine goes down and down into the mystery of this apparent *acte gratuit*: 'Simply what was not allowed allured us' “⁶

Eventually, Augustine concludes that sin stems from the need for companionship and love. He concludes he would have not stolen the pears if it weren't for the peer pressure of his friends. He also compares this story to that of Adam and Eve, claiming that Adam tasted from the apple to have that shared experience with Eve:

“Augustine's point is that Adam helps neither Eve nor himself by trying to separate off a lower love from the Source of love. *That* is the lesson he finds in his own courting of favor from his fellow thieves in the pear orchard. He sees here his own distant echo of Adam's sin, the primordial sin, the quest for love by motion away from the one place where it can be found.”⁷

Daniel's sin, the theft from the drug dealer, was committed in a party situation with two other people- Michael Alig and Robert Riggs. What part did those circumstances play in what happened?

Augustine's theory seems to touch on ideas of a void to be filled. The way he thinks of god as *the* source of love, could be paralleled in how modern psychology thinks of a parent. In this way, the pears in his case and the three

⁶ Wills, Garry. Saint Augustine: A Life. London: Penguin Books, 1999. Pg.10-11

⁷ Garry Wills, 1999. Pg. 15

thousand dollars in Daniel's case, operate on a symbolic level, as objects of desire. Daniel's crime becomes linked to his absence from his father's writings.

In his father's book, he is a void, and in his life, he seeks to fill a void. *Winter Journal* is written in 2012, sixteen years after the crime has occurred. I have no way of tracing back what lead to what. I can only guess that there was some sort of prior parental absence in Daniel's life that lead to complex situations. Things happened as they did, and his absence from the book is a testimony to that. The "that" or the way things happened, or anything that is prior to the book – all of this remains a mystery. All I can do is point out the empty spaces, the question marks, and use them as a tool to pull out questions about my own life.

Daniel's arrival at my studio gave me temporary stories and metaphors, a mirror and a reflection that opened up a set of creative possibilities.

"This is a new song about ummm... it's about ummm... it's a Broadway musical... and it's a... some people look at their life and say, well, my life's like a movie... And then they talk about what seems went down... and yeah, in some movies there's tunes, you know... and ummm... this is like a show tune for my movie..."

Neil Young (words before singing "A Man Needs a Maid", Live at Massey Hall 1971)

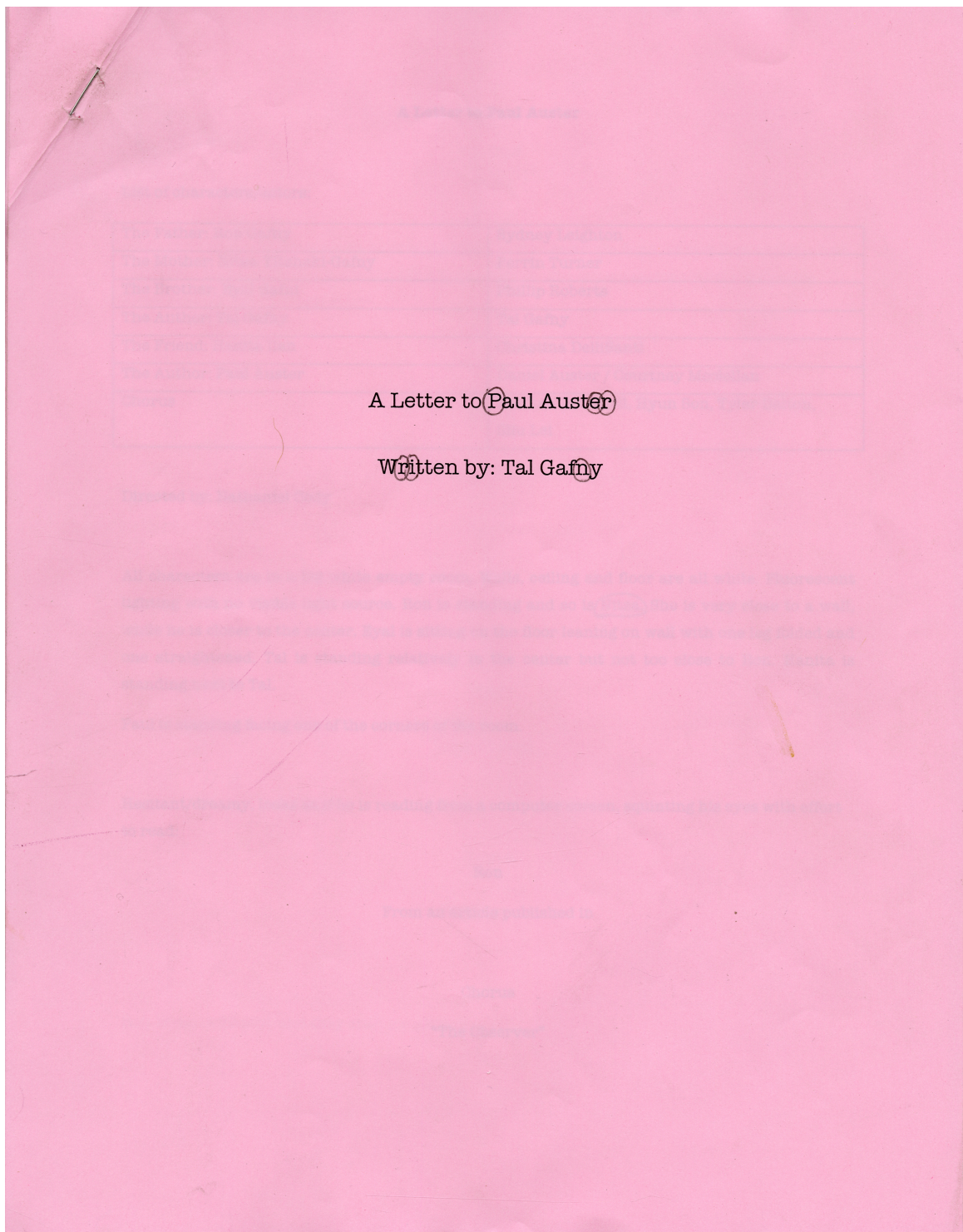
Double Take

This mirror gave birth to my thesis project called *Double Take* with Perrin Turner.

I would like to trace back the way it was born:

For the performance “A Letter to Paul Auster”, I cast Perrin Turner, one of the students I was working with, as my mother. Perrin, like the others, was in an undergraduate advanced sculpture class I was a teaching assistant for. What I knew of him and his work up until that point (around mid-semester), built up to that intuitive choice to cast him as my mother. He was the only casting decision I was sure about from the very beginning. Other parts, such as my brother and father, needed more thinking and were less immediate.

Months later, when Perrin and I were already working together, I found the specific script he had been using, and noticed he circled the letters of his name within the title. (See image in following page)



In class, Perrin made some work that had to do with the absence of his father, Jamie Turner, from his life. Perrin's dad, left home when Perrin was two years old. Perrin didn't meet his father again until last spring. I remember his first presentation, of a book that he made, where there was an image of a screen-capture from his phone, and he explained that these were text messages between him and his dad. There was just a phone number at the top, no contact name, and I asked how come he didn't have his father's number saved as a contact on his phone. I immediately felt so guilty for being so direct. I asked it without thinking. It just alerted me, made me jump with the question. But that was the moment when we had our first interaction. It was so awkward, and I think that is why I remember it as if there were no other people around, just us lit only by the light of the projector.

After doing the performance, the whole Auster story gradually faded out of my work. My communication with Daniel ran aground and I suppose I need some time to be able to take some distance away from it, on an emotional level.

In the beginning of spring semester, I was still struggling to pull this relationship with Daniel back into my studio. It was hard for me to figure out what I wanted to do with this, since the weight seemed to be on a relationship that was finished. It was also a problem of what medium to use – what materials can work through psychological material such as this? I tried object making for a while, but it didn't seem to go anywhere. Now I think it was that same issue of stillness of the objects that I had struggled with before. I was trying to deal with subject

matter that is about movement, change and interaction. I needed to be able to use words, and sound, and moving images.

One afternoon in early February I had a studio visit with Corin Hewitt. When he arrived at my studio he stood at the gate and said something like – “there’s no reason for us to be in here, right? Let’s just go across the street to get coffee and sit there and talk.” It scared me so much that there was nothing to look at in the studio, that all we could do was talk. And it was an alerting conversation. I remember Corin saying a few things: 1. In a way, the majority of work for this project has already been done, in contacting Daniel. 2. *Winter Journal* was not written for *me* and that’s why it is interesting that I decided to act the way I did after reading it. 3. The material here is the story, my story of reading the book and finding Daniel, nothing else. 4. It is not necessary that objects would come out of this. It could be a video or writing. 5. It seems like I would have to be using words.

In my anxiety of an empty studio, I pressed to know why it could not be exclusively objects. Corin sent me to write my thoughts, write the story, and record it in someone else’s voice. And then, if I have to insist upon objects, try making three objects that react to the recording.

So I went and I wrote, and two days later I recorded Perrin – again, an immediate and intuitive choice. Then I went home and listened to it over and over again in the haze of suddenly getting really sick. Lying in bed for three days with high fever produced ideas for three objects. I always fall for this trap – to think

that I have it all figured out in advance, and now all I have to do is to execute. To make a long story short, I struggled with making these objects for a few weeks and it just didn't work out. I finally gave in – I decided to make a film.

Brilliantly, it was Corin's push to make that recording that brought Perrin back into the picture, into my studio and into my life. I only worked on it for a week or so before it came to mind that Perrin could and should be a part of this.

One week before the show we wrote each other letters that ended up included in the show itself. Perrin wrote me: (see image in following page)

Tal,

When I agreed to work with you, I had no way of knowing the position I was stepping into or who I would become.

Interested friends would often ask me what I was working on, what we were doing. More than once I responded with "I don't know". I still feel so guilty about those moments because they seemed to point toward my doubts or lack of involvement in something that I was supposed to believe in completely...

But it was so true! I think that neither of us really knew what we were doing for a while. We were searching desperately for something. You had been on this search long before I began working with you, and when I joined you it was like jumping onto a speeding treadmill. I matched your speed and adopted your sense of urgency. This was at a time when I was also desperate to connect with someone and commit to something in hopes of filling a void of my own... I really lost myself to those feelings, and to you.

This project has reached an emotional level that is way out of hand. Very early on, it became impossible for me to make the distinctions between our collaboration, my relationship to you, and my own personal life. It took some time, but gradually I stopped trying to define these separately. This is why I felt torn in the way I talked about our collaboration. I didn't know how to explain to anyone, especially my friends, that our project meant something akin to fusing my life with yours at the cost of my other relationships... or I didn't feel like I could tell people that. It's been exhausting, and painful at times, but it has proved to be one of the most beautiful things that I've ever experienced. It's taken a lot of faith, but I think that's why we got into this in the first place. This whole thing would be pointless if we'd done things any differently.

It was the feeling that you needed me that kept me going at times... other times it was the fact that I needed you. At the same time, something important has been humming promisingly on the horizon. Right off the bat, we denounced the merits of producing a "finished piece of art". The result is that we went into overdrive permanently and constructed an entire world for ourselves. It's really problematic to try and display something, like this, that has no apparent end.

This movie has been a sort of link between us and the real world. Even when I was unable to describe our project in full detail, I could talk about the movie we were making. This is funny to me because, the longer we work on the video, the more it seems to fall short of capturing everything we've been through. Maybe that was never supposed to be its job. Ultimately, I think that the process of showing the movie will be our bridge back into two separate lives. But the place we are now will extend infinitely nonetheless.

I really mean infinitely. I want to stay close with you after you move away.

Love,

Perrin

The making of this film was all but “knowing in advance”, having it “figured out”. And at some point I felt I was almost getting addicted to this feeling; to just work, intuitively, leave the figuring out, the editing, for later; having trust in the fact that this is indeed a way of thinking. As Perrin mentions in his letter to me, we even gave up on the idea of having a finished artwork by the time the show opens. This might be a long-term project, we thought, and we will stay loyal to that even at the cost of showing something unfinished. As far as I’m concerned, it ended up being finished. I don’t think of it as a miracle, or as overcoming obstacles we thought we couldn’t tackle. I think that my definition for “a finished artwork” has simply changed. From something hermetic, that offers a closed system of ideas, that requires interpretation and understanding from the viewer - in this piece I am more interested in posing a set of questions, and my ideal viewer is one that leaves the space with a fragmented story. I hope it is fragmented in a way that the gaps are in the right places and in the right size, for the viewer to projects him/herself. I hope it reads as a constructed fragmentation, one that has been composed deliberately to allow room for projection. In a way, I hope to evoke responses that are similar to the one I had when I read *Winter Journal*. I had always dreamt of a viewer that sees my work without knowing me, and finds something of me in him. A few years ago a friend said to me that she wanted someone to see her work and fall in love with her. I can identify with that.

There are a few moments in the film I find worth mentioning in the context of writing this paper, especially in relation to my previous work. The first one has to do with my ongoing interest in geometry. One of the objects I made in the fall,

which ended up being shown in the film, is an aluminum cast of a model for an imaginary architectural space. As an image in a film I could add a narration that would accompany this object. The text I wrote for it says: “Geometry is absence. There are no circles, no rectangles, no triangles. Only circular things, rectangular and triangular things.” I had finally made a statement about what geometry was for me - absence. It finally carried a specific psychological content that was personal.



The second moment is what Perrin and I did with the eyebrow – we just went into a room and shot me hanging the eyebrow on the wall, and peeling it off,

in different angles. In this way, via the camera, it could exist as a changing object. It could bring forth my initial intention for this object – to act as a signifier for mood and emotion. The way we edited it in the video, it starts with me hanging it at a certain angle, and Perrin saying: “Yeah, that looks more angry.”

The third moment, was shooting the glass sphere. We built a little pink room for it (the color choice tried to match the color of the pink copy paper of my script, thinking of the black sphere as black type on pink paper). We made a hole in the floor of the pink room, beneath the sphere, through which I inserted the torch to spread the black smoke inside. Again, the camera allowed this object to exist in its becoming, rather than in its finite state, which was more loyal to my initial intention for it. The weight was on the spreading of the soot rather than on a black sphere. It was another void in the process of being filled.

The search for physical empty spaces was a major part of our journey. Perrin had found one early on. It was an empty pool next to a church in Richmond that he had discovered last year. He wanted to shoot it very early on, and I didn’t understand yet what this was all about. He did the first set of shooting there on his own. He went there on a snowy day and came back with beautiful footage of this abandoned pool from different angles. He said he had a vision of shooting it again with us inside. He built a tall tower for the camera to get a bird’s eye view and we carried it and snuck it into the pool in the middle of the night. The next morning we came back and did the shooting. I was still not sure what

this was going to be in the film. It ended up being the visuals for a narration of a dream I had around that time.

Dreaming is Sinning / Sinning is Dreaming

I cannot remember which pool I came across first - the pool in my dream or the empty pool we shot for a scene in our film. So it is possible, that what I am about to describe is a hybrid between these two places.

It was a pool with no bottom. And in my dream I knew that it was rotated in 90 degrees - that what was once its floor became its sidewall. Its horizontal dimension has been transformed into an endless vertical line.

There were people around, hanging out by the pool, but no one was inside it. It was clear to me that I was the only one struggling with the idea of getting in. The dial looked like a microwave's dial, and I was turning it back and forth, playing with all the different options, believing that I can find the right settings for me to be able to dive in. It was visually spectacular - how the water would change in an instant. I was trying to figure out what was cleaner - clear water or water with chlorine. Chlorine is a chemical that is added to water to neutralize it from bacteria, but it also threatens to destroy the cleansing quality of the water. Perhaps something sterile can never be cleansing.

The subway tunnel in Daniel's dream (see last quote in "My Curated Collection of Quotes"), is also, like my pool, a space that is beneath us, that is an

invitation to freedom, to movement, to a physical experience that is unburdening.
Daniel's subway tunnel is denied from him. [REDACTED]

I, in my dream, can't find a bathing suit. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] What is my sin? And why can't I just jump into the water?
What is it that makes me turn around? When I turn I find my mother, the
authority, which I can parallel to the [REDACTED] in Daniel's dream. I walk away from the
pool towards my mother, with her box of unfit solutions. She is kind, and warm
and patient with my dissatisfaction. The pool vanishes. Now it is just us, under a
spotlight, and the side of the pool operates as a stage, and I myself, as the
dreamer, am the only person in the audience. The cardboard box, with all of her
swimsuits, is our set of props, as we improvise our way through this play.

Daniel wakes up, and he writes me an email describing his dream. He is
restless like me. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I've had
a recurring pool in my dreams for years. But this specific one was not my regular
pool. Perhaps it is a sign of change. My mind invented a new pool, rather than
using the one it already had. So what is the new symbolic content behind this
specific pool?

My mother has been showing up in my dreams all year long, every single
night, from the moment I came back to Richmond until the moment we made up.

Once we were talking again, she disappeared from my dreams, and I found it to be a great relief. Not just the peace between us, but the room that has been made clear for me to dream of other things.

“When our father and mother and nurses are absent, You are present, who created us, who call us, who can use those placed over us for some good unto the salvation of our souls.” (the confessions pg..)

What do we do without a god, though? Can our friends substitute for our parents and their love? Can Augustine’s pears do that? Can Daniel do that for me? Could my work? Does the desire for sin, just like any other desire, comes from a lack or a void? A lack of a god / a lack of a parent? I’m not sure what my sin is exactly, but I’ve often talked to my therapist about growing up with a sense of guilt. I felt an unexplained disappointment or anger from my parents, especially my mother. I felt I was constantly being suspected for something I could not put into words.

This is dreaming. Dreaming is the work of filling the voids, or, it is when and where the voids present themselves as material. This throws another word to the equation of dream and sin – cure. Dreaming is sinning is healing.

*Hello cowgirl in the sand
Is this place
at your command
Can I stay here
for a while
Can I see your
sweet sweet smile
Old enough now
to change your name
When so many love you
is it the same?
It 's the woman in you
that makes you want
to play this game.*

*Hello ruby in the dust
Has your band
begun to rust
After all
the sin we 've had
I was hopin ' that
we 'd turn bad*

*Old enough now
to change your name
When so many love you
is it the same
It 's the woman in you
that makes you want
to play this game.*

*Hello woman of my dreams
This is not
the way it seems
Purple words
on a grey background
To be a woman
and to be turned down
Old enough now
to change your name
When so many love you
is it the same
It 's the woman in you
that makes you want
to play this game.*

Neil Young, Cowgirl in the Sand

Consequences

Dreaming and being awake can equally produce consequence.

The pool dream leads me to talk to my mother -

The morning after I dreamt about the bottomless pool, I called my mother for the first time in the entire year. I decided to end the silence and spare us both from the trouble and pain of processing it all in a conversation. This is work to be done separately, and there is only room for simple warmth right now - that was my instinct. It was a good conversation, which led to more conversations, which felt like a dam finally broken through. I told her about my dream and she interpreted it for me in an interesting way - but that is between us. As I said, I have been dreaming about her almost every single night in the past year, and this pool dream was the final one. Once she made her return to my waking life, she stopped appearing in my dreams.

Reading Winter Journal leads me to Daniel -

Daniel is mentioned in the book. He is brought to the reader's attention. Yet he never speaks or acts, which leaves the reader with a huge amount of room to fantasize, if they are interested in doing that, or, if they are bound to do it

due to their own personal background. And so I did, and so did I need, so bad, for this fantasy to come true. I needed Daniel to exist. Ester Partegas told me - "You are attracted to absences". She said it was good as material for my work, but not as a way of living. I had later found out, that several other people were concerned for me in this whole Daniel thing. I found him, and I lost him. The empty space after the loss is of course so different than the one before it - now he is missing from my life and not just from Paul's *Winter Journal*. My work was intended to react to his absence in the book, but ended up being a reaction to his absence in my life, which was metonymic to other absences in my life, and eventually in Perrin's life as well.

Daniel's crime leads to... -

Daniel committed a crime in 1996. What were the consequences of this crime? *Winter Journal* written the way it was written, me contacting him, the making of *Double Take*, the relationship between Perrin and me, [REDACTED]. What else? Probably so much more, possibly everything.

Walter White's cancer leads to -

When Walter finds out he is sick, it seems that he instinctually embarks on a journey to heal himself. Not from the cancer itself, but from the stillness of his life. Chemistry can no longer remain a science in potential in his life (as a chemistry teacher) - it has to start to act and react, to change. Thus cooking meth is first and foremost a beautiful metaphor for the activation of reactions. Refining the mixing of certain chemicals to produce a divine form of crystal, meant to cause a divine chemical reaction in the users' brain.

On this road - he loses his family. The relationship with Skyler, Walter Jr., not to mention the heartbreaking psychological damage caused to baby Holly, is the price for all of this. Yet in the end math, it seems like things could not have been done differently. If other people are what stand between a man and his happiness, or his journey after truth - should he not make the sacrifice? Dreaming is sinning is curing.

Even though he is dying from cancer, WW eventually dies from a gunshot, in the process of freeing Jesse Pinkman, in a meth lab. The last thing he sees is his reflection in a Methylamine barrel. In the last shot we see his body lying on the lab's floor from a bird's-eye view, as the cops choreographically enter the space towards and then past him, as they realize him to be dead.

"It's better to burn out, than to fade away"

Neil Young, My My Hey Hey (Out of the Blue)

My mother has recently found out she has lung cancer. This is the reason why I am going back to Israel. I wish for her some act of change. I think it will happen.

Memory and Change

It is known about St. Augustine's Confessions, that the process of writing was intertwined with his conversion to Christianity. In other words, the process of writing an autobiography became a ground to posing questions to God, the addressee of the text. The process of telling his life story had a parallel process of converting to Christianity. This is a book of change.

In the first episode of Breaking Bad, Walter White, the chemistry teacher who's about to become a crystal meth cook, explains to his high school students:

"Chemistry. It is the study of what?... Chemistry is... Well, technically, chemistry is the study of matter. But I prefer to see it as the study of change. Now just – just think about this. Electrons. They change their energy levels. Molecules. Molecules change their bonds. Elements. They combine and change into compounds. Well, that's – that's all of life, right? I mean it's just – it's the constant, it's the cycle. It's solution, dissolution, just over and over and over. It is growth, then decay, then transformation. "

For Augustine, god is the opposite of change; he is unchangeable, which may imply sin to be change, or maybe all of life, being human, as contained within the notion of change.

Daniel and I stopped talking. Some people in my life had all sorts of decisive statements about our short-term communication. In my mind, our encounter was beyond space or time or the possibility of any kind of

manifestation from the first place. It took me time and over coming much frustration, to realize and accept this. It could remain unfulfilled for the rest of our lives. Yet there is great significance for the moment in which our spirits flew across each other, like to gusts of wind creating an X shape in the air. A mark has been made and change has occurred. That, on its own, it is a place and a time that may lie upon a different set of rules, but still exist. The recurrence of locations in dreams proves that they are places, which are there constantly, whether we visit them or not.

Recently, whenever my mother and I meet in a dream we go through boxes and boxes of clothes. The boxes are cardboard moving boxes, pretty big and rather square. We sit in my bedroom from the apartment we lived in from when I was 18-20 (that one time, we were at a pool, and the box was one with bathing suits). We unpack and discover beautiful shirts, pairs of pants, dresses and shoes. All designed by my brain as I dream. I become a fashion designer, and in my dreams, those clothes and shoes look spectacular. I always experience a feeling of remembering as I take one item after the other out of the box. "Oh yes, I forgot about this shirt! I love it! I should really wear it more often." It is the feeling of remembering, yet there is no past to these memories. They are memories stuck in a single dreamt moment in my sleep.

"Great is the power of memory, exceedingly great, O my God, a spreading limitless room within me."⁸

⁸ Michael P. Foley (editor), 2006. Pg. 197

My limitless room has a complex form that is hard to describe. In order that I may call it limitless, does it have to be borderless from all directions? No lines at all? How is it a room then? Every space must have edges in order to be a space. Limitless room must be a unit of time then. Or maybe - an anti-unit of time. It is constructed of all places I've been and all places I've been in my dreams. The places in my dreams are often hybrids between different places in my waking life, or places distorted. So in this memory palace they are like physical time warps, rooms with locked doors that are forbidden to me in thinking, but are wide open when my eyes shut down. Even though I have excluded the option of architecture, I can't help but visualize a form; it is a long hallway full of turns and doors. The height of the ceiling shifts, or perhaps the floor sinks, sometimes so suddenly.

Fiction

Last year, I divided a photo of my mother into three, from shoulders to toes. The head was missing from the original photo, because my dad was really photographing me. In the film, we included a scene where these photo segments appear. The feet become a symbol for parental authority. I remember that in my first day in kindergarten, fearing saying goodbye to my mom, I wrapped my arms around her leg, thinking I had come up with the perfect trap - she can't move anywhere now! Of course she slid her leg out from the top and left me there crying. I remember how surprised I was she had managed to escape my grip.

Some people who saw the video said our bodies are the same, that we have the same style. Maybe. I think she was sexier than me. And I hope our bodies are different so that I don't get sick too some day. She is forever escaping my grip.

A letter to Perrin: (see image in following page)

Perrin,

Sometimes it kills me how loneliness is built into being, and how it's even more built into making work, into a studio, any studio.

I asked you to work with me because I knew I was facing a journey that I did not want to take alone and also maybe could not take alone.

I recognized a parallel mental structure between the two of us. I think the past few months have proved me right. I'm curious to know how much of that is apparent to a person watching our film. Even after we part ways with the work we've made, and hand it over to a viewer, I believe that some of the information will remain ours only.

Similar as we may be, there is also a gap. Age difference is inevitably a part of this. It's not about maturity, like you often suspect me to think, but it is about a different kind of energy. I can barely remember myself at 21, because some things happened, between then and now, that split my life into two.

However, I can recall a different take on closeness, loneliness, friendship, relationships, sex, love, falling in and out of love. My parents were something else for me then than they are today.

I know you perceive Daniel differently than I do. I think it's because Daniel and I have parallel structures that are different than those that you and I share. And that is precisely the reason that you are by no means a substitute for Daniel. Daniel is not here, you are, but you occupy a different territory in me.

There is a big void inside me, that opened up in a single moment, at the age of six, when my parents split up. Making work, for me, is hanging out in that emptied space. My interactions with people are often intensive, almost desperate attempts to fill this void.

Sometimes I get confused, and I ask my work to fill it up, and those interactions with people make their way into the work and become a part of it.

Yet when I am astute enough, when I am focused from within, and my mind manages to pick up on a very specific frequency, this confusion becomes important, and interesting, and strong.

Our minds have crossed paths, and they are chemically changed now, forever. I experience life as a long series of separations, one after the other, but at the same time, separation is something completely fictitious.

I can't know when we will work together again, or even when I will see you again. My home is calling me to come back, you know why, and I have to go back, even though I've always felt homeless. I am going to miss you, terribly, and if I was 21 it would drive me mad. But now, at 29, I'm totally cool with that, because I know we are still hanging out together, in that empty pool, in a theatre with no audience - our parallel mental spaces that we have turned into a shared studio.

Love,

Tal

Wake Up

Augustine claims that it is agreed upon that being awake is better than being asleep. Yet he also acknowledges the difficulties of waking up. By mentioning this difficulty, he may not be touching directly on other ways of thinking of sleep, but he opens the door to its emotional complexity. Walter White's being awake is metaphorical. It seems that it is closer to the notion of dreaming, or being close to your dreams, or translating your dreams into reality. In this way, being awake and being asleep become closer to each other, rather than existing as two disparate states of being.

The first action that Perrin and I did together as we decided to make the film, was to transcribe the lyrics for *Evil Wheel*, a song by the band Follow for Now, in which Perrin's dad played bass guitar. Perrin had found that there was nowhere online where you could find the lyrics, and wanted to post them. This was our first void-filling: (see image in following page)



Wake up!!



(ooh)



Had to kick it to the left side



Because the right side got too cold

You're doin' an awful lot of game playin' for you to be so old

And you can't keep up with the Joneses Jones before the hit clip on MTV

So you wanna be someone someday but now you're just a wannabe

And the evil wheel keeps rollin'

(hey hey)

Construction bell keeps tollin'

You can try to turn the right cheek if you don't like gettin' involved

But a problem's still a problem and to turn your cheek'll leave the problem unsolved

You don't wanna dirty your suit

So you sit in the AC, diggin' your wealth

But you see the problem and your not try'na right it is a much greater evil that the world itself

And the evil wheel keeps rollin'

(hey hey)

Construction bell keeps tollin'

Can't build a mansion on food stamps

Awes ss ooh ooh

Edit



Follow For Now album

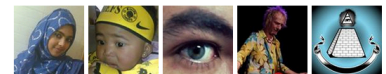
- 1 Holy Moses lyrics
- 2 Temptation lyrics
- 3 Mistreatin' Folks lyrics
- 4 She Watch Channel Zero lyrics
- 5 Time lyrics
- 6 Fire 'N Snakes lyrics
- 7 Evil Wheel lyrics
- 8 Ms. Fortune lyrics
- 9 White Hood lyrics
- 10 Trust lyrics
- 11 6's and 7's lyrics
- 12 Milkbone lyrics



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A Substitute for Love

So now that Daniel is long gone, I have no one but myself to decide what is ok and what is not ok to write about him and to show about him. Not only in terms of his privacy, but also in terms of consequences. The moment I start to construct written or visual stories that revolve around Daniel, I become a participant in the construction of his life. I do not mean this in an arrogant way, but in a fearful way. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I honestly believe that this is not the case. These are not my intentions. I think I am mostly telling a story about myself, and as for Daniel – I feel I'm in a position of asking questions about him, marking a mystery in his absence, as well as in my longing for his appearance. I try to point out that I believe he is all but his crime. He is love and he is longing for love, he is unattainable and by that he is desirable.

I don't feel ready yet, to leave him to be only a character, only a testimony to whom I really am. And that might be the greatest evidence of all. In that sense, I am stepping into the shoes of Paul Auster, into the position of an author. What we refuse to say or to write testifies to something that we are destined to never capture in our work, to forever chase.

There was a moment, in the very beginning, I was afraid I was substituting Daniel with Perrin. It was a moment of desire. I am pretty sure Perrin felt it too, or at the very least was wondering if that was the case.

But reality won, and it was a beautiful and graceful victory. Daniel, in his silence and disappearance, made room for Perrin in my life. Perrin was truly there and we made work together, and as we made the work we made our closeness. Perrin is by no means a substitute for Daniel. Daniel was a substitute for love. And perhaps this is why I still want him to show up – it's in the place of desire.

Perrin made a series of hooks made from bended steel rod. It was supposed to be a part of our installation for the film, but we ended up excluding it. I love these hooks. They look like letters of an ancient language. I made a hook too, last fall. It was a part of a sculpture of an eye, and I thought of it as a shred of metal stuck on a retina. I want to make a surface for Perrin's hooks. I also want to draw them and turn them into a pattern, and from that pattern make another surface – maybe Formica to laminate a countertop. I have a title in mind – “They hold Things”. It's taken from a title of crossword puzzle. This could be the beginning of our next collaboration.

“And when will I see you again?”

Neil Young, A Man Needs A Maid

A Dream From Last Night

I dreamt that I was on a committee that was summoned to propose creative personas to receive a Nobel Prize for peace. It was a huge committee and we gathered in a big room with florescent lights that looked like a gym. Each in our turn announced their proposal. In my mind, I flipped through names of artists, actors, directors and musicians. When my turn came I felt so insecure to disclose my decision, and with lips shaking I mumbled out: Neil Young.

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